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ABSTRACT

Persuasion theories typically attempt to account for attitude change, but mass media reviews influence more ephemeral variables, the chief of which is "interest" in attending or otherwise consuming a cultural event or object. Reviewing and other forms of "evaluative journalism"--including much sports, consumer, and political reportage--affect interest primarily through variation in two variables: information and evaluation. A study examined the processes that accompany audience reaction to reviews. Subjects, 226 students enrolled in large introductory mass media courses for majors and non-majors at a state university, after a pretest, were randomly assigned to one of seven film-review treatments of different evaluative directions and information levels: (1) negative, mixed, and positive reviews with a low level of information; (2) negative, mixed, and positive reviews with a high level of information; and (3) a "non-review" which contained a high level of information but no evaluative adjectives or phrases. A posttest was also administered. Results indicated that a high level of neutral information increased interest in a film compared with a low level, but information level was not as powerful as evaluation direction. Neutral information alone, however, increased interest almost as much as a positive, high-information review. (Nineteen notes, four tables of data, and one figure are included.) (MS)

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The Positive Effect of Neutral Information in Evaluative Journalism

A Paper Presented to the Mass Communication and Society Division of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, Portland OR, July 1988

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ABSTRACT

The Positive Effect of Neutral Information in Evaluative Journalism

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Persuasion theories typically attempt to account for attitude change, but mass media reviews influence more ephemeral variables, the chief of which is interest in attending or otherwise consuming a cultural event or object. Reviewing and other forms of "evaluative journalism"--including much sports, consumer and political reportage--affect interest primarily through variation in two variables: information and evaluation. The current experiment manipulated evaluation direction (negative, mixed, positive) and information level (low, high) in a 2 X 3 design. A "non-review" containing a high level of neutral information but no evaluative adjectives or phrases served as a control. Results indicated that a high level of information increased interest in a film compared with a low level, but information level was not as powerful as evaluation direction. Neutral information alone, however, increased interest almost as much as a positive, high-information review.

The Positive Effect of Neutral Information in Evaluative Journalism

Although arts reviewing in the mass media may appear to be a form of persuasion, leading persuasion theories are generally unenlightening in explaining how reviews influence audiences. The study of persuasion, Miller observes in a recent review article, has been virtually identical with the study of attitude change.[1] Yet most arts reviews in the mass media are not intended to affect long-term attitudes that function as filters for the whole of experience. Rather, reviews are intended to provide timely information and evaluation relevant to an immediate decision about whether to attend or otherwise consume a cultural event or object. Reviews do not typically present detailed arguments intended to persuade an audience to hold certain attitudes or beliefs--nor are they designed to generate or resolve cognitive dissonance, or induce conditioned behavior, or prompt elaboration of carefully phrased ratiocinations or manipulate social judgment to influence readers.

Most persuasion theories describe the alteration of deep and underlying cognitive predispositions which are (1) general and (2) consistent or enduring. Thus McGuire defines an attitude as "an intervening variable that mediates between generalized reception and response tendencies."[2] Petty and Cacioppo, developers of a sophisticated theory of self-persuasion, the Elaboration Likelihood Model, consider an attitude to be "a general and enduring positive or negative feeling about some

person, object or issue."[3] And Fishbein and Ajzen, whose flexible theory of information and attitude change has been amenable to explaining mass media effects, define attitude as "a learned predisposition to respond in a consistently favorable or unfavorable manner with respect to a given object."[4]

But the purpose of reviewing, as Hohenberg notes in his recent newswriting text, is much more limited: "to provide information on a cultural work or performance of interest to the public, and to evaluate it for potential audiences."[5] Likewise, in a nationwide survey of 166 film critics, 13 items representing various functions of reviewing produced two major factors, "Objective Reporting" and "Personal Impression/Judgment."[6]

Indeed, space and time constraints in modern mass media rarely allow the journalist opportunity to include more than a brief summary of the facts relevant to an event and a terse personal appraisal of its quality--although "critics" who write in upscale magazines and learned journals sometimes adopt the role of interpreter, analyst, polemicist or dialectician. This absence of interpretation and analysis in much mass media criticism has prompted theatrical director and New Republic drama critic Robert Brustein to complain:

"Criticism in newspapers and weekly magazines is largely consumer criticism, with the critic functioning as a consumer's guide index, telling people what they'd enjoy seeing. That criticism has a certain value. . .but it leaves out the object in between, which is the work of theater. It talks about the play largely in terms of value judgments, but as far as any real

analysis, any interpretation. . .you rarely find that in daily or weekly criticism, though it's that kind of criticism only that benefits the theater."[7]

In a typical mass media review, the critic's appraisal may be accompanied by specific factual examples to support the evaluation, but--unlike counterarguing with an editorial or seeking flaws in the logic of an analysis--readers of reviews can only confirm or dispute the evaluative content by experiencing the work of art themselves.

Mass media reviewing also seeks to affect a different dependent variable than persuasion. In persuasion, the overriding purpose is to promote audience agreement with the writer's perspective. The overriding purpose of reviewing, however, is quite different: to stimulate or depress audience interest in consuming an cultural event or object.

Mass media reviewing is also part of a more pervasive journalistic phenomenon than might appear on first consideration. Although reviews are conventionally lumped with editorials under the catch-all of opinion writing,[8] a closer examination suggests that reviewing is a category of a larger genre of reportage which we will designate "evaluative journalism." This genre includes much sports writing and consumer reporting in addition to the more traditional provinces of criticism, commentary and analysis. And it may embrace political reporting as well when the politician's "performance" comes under scrutiny, as is increasingly the case with modern campaigning.

These forms of "evaluative journalism" share two characteristics which distinguish them from much "persuasive" writing: (1) the immediate news function of presenting basic factual information about a current or forthcoming event or object, usually before it has been experienced by audience members; and (2) a simultaneous, often personal, evaluation of the quality of the execution of that event or object. By contrast, editorials are more conventionally forms of persuasion in that they usually consist of arguments intended to change readers' views or present perspectives crafted to lead them to a higher understanding of issues.[9]

Evaluative journalism is a distinctive form because the writer's evaluations are the result of his or her own tastes and, as such, are personal and often idiosyncratic. In fact, many evaluative journalists present their judgments in a highly individualistic and self-conscious style. As the bromide goes, "There's no arguing with taste"--a fact that invites discerning readers or viewers to cultivate a relation with evaluative journalists different from that developed with editorialists or hard-news reporters. This relation may involve trust, or, in some cases, antipathy, after an audience member comes to know the tastes and prejudices of the critic.

In attempting to construct a theory explaining the effects of reviewing and other forms of evaluative journalism, it might be useful to examine the processes that accompany audience reaction to even the most basic review.

Reviewing at its simplest might consist of nothing more than a bylined statement boiling down to: "Andrew Lloyd Webber's stage musical 'The Phantom of the Opera' will open on Broadway tonight at the Majestic Theater. I have seen a preview, and the show is mediocre."

From this statement, we learn the facts surrounding a performance and the writer's evaluation. This evaluation could be styled "opinion" in the sense that it is personal and perhaps considered, but it is not opinion in the sense that it is a carefully thought-out position on a major issue, as might be the case with the "weightier" arguments found in editorials and columns. Rather, it is an expression of taste.

A more complex review of "The Phantom of the Opera" might provide examples of particularly good or bad characteristics of the musical. It might also place the performance within the wider context of other musicals or previous productions by the composer. But that's about it.

Imagine, then, the hypothetical reader's reaction to information about this musical show. He or she might be highly partial to musicals, indifferent to them or decidedly hostile. In other words, prior to exposure to basic factual information about an artistic commodity--e.g., the plot of a play, the cast of a new film, the subject matter of a new book--some potential audience members will already differ from others.

Then, upon being told of an event's occurrence and other neutral or non-evaluative facts, the reader may develop higher or lower interest merely by encountering the factual details.

Furthermore, this reader's level of interest might be heightened or lowered by the reviewer's evaluation of the quality of the performance.

In the model being constructed, the primary dependent variable is interest in attending or otherwise consuming the work of art. Interest has been selected because it is the major variable--so crucial to artists and promoters--which the mass media reviewer can reasonably affect. The critic cannot control the external factors that might ultimately lead a person to attend or avoid a cultural event. The critic cannot manipulate whether a theater will be convenient or a book affordable, whether a spouse or date will be available or willing to accompany the consumer, or whether a competing event will distract his or her attention. Thus, interest in attending is but one component in a more complex decision to attend.

A positive, mixed or negative review can, as Wyatt and Badger have shown in experimental settings,[10] alter subjects' interest in attending an artistic event. Further, as Haskins has shown, interest in media content--measured on a 0-100 "feeling thermometer"--is a reliable predictor of a variety of forms of audience behavior, including magazine, advertising and cartoon readership.[11]

The primary means of altering film-going interest in Wyatt and Badger's previous experiments was alteration of the direction of the reviewer's evaluation--negative, mixed or positive--by manipulating the adjectives that conveyed judgment. The more positive the evaluation of a film, the higher the reader interest

in attending the film. But Wyatt and Badger also found that detailed but "neutral" background and plot information alone--stripped of any evaluation in a treatment they designated a "non-review"--will significantly increase interest in attending a film almost as much as identical information accompanied by positive or mixed adjectives and significantly more than that accompanied by a negative appraisal. That is, information alone, in a form not unlike a typical "announcement story," is about as effective in raising interest as a rave review.

This "positive effect of neutral information" is consonant with the effects observed in three separate traditions of research. First, Zajonc's "mere exposure" hypothesis indicates that repeated exposure to an individual stimulus enhances favorable attitudes toward that object monotonically.[12] Second, as Moles finds, experiments based on information theory predict an inverted-U relation where positive attitudes toward an object increase with increasing information--that is, with the reduction of uncertainty--until overkill occurs and the subject becomes trivialized.[13] Favorable attitudes then drop off. Third, a group of experiments by Teigen has generally found that interest in a communication increases with the amount of new information presented, particularly when subjects are given new information about a subject with which they are already sufficiently familiar.[14]

As all three theories relate to reviewing, increased information about a work of art should lead to increased interest in attending that work--assuming that a single review rarely

leads to overload and that elements involved in a performance are rarely completely novel. Although the informational content of the experimental reviews employed in Wyatt and Badger's studies is denotatively neutral, it may not be as neutral connotatively as the "nonsense" words employed by Zajonc were. However, most of the value assigned to the content must be supplied by the beholder because it is not explicit in the content itself. That is, both Zajonc's stimuli and the non-review may be said to be inherently neutral, although for any given reader, they may be said to possess attributed value. For example, a film about a middle-aged British college professor whose life is unraveling is not implicitly interesting to all potential filmgoers but may be highly interesting to some.

The experiments underlying the three theories supporting the positive effect of neutral information did not, however, examine the effects of different levels of information in the presence of evaluative adjectives and phrases of different valences. And, although Wyatt and Badger's experiments did show that neutral information may produce a positive effect, their work provided little understanding of how different amounts, or levels, of information might function within the context of negative, mixed or positive evaluations.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Will, for example, the presence of a great deal of neutral information mitigate the effects of negative evaluation? (Many a

reviewer has written what he or she thought was a mixed-to-negative review, only to be told by a reader that the work of art under discussion sounded utterly fascinating.) Will the evaluative dimension of reviews prove more powerful than the informative when the level of information is reduced to the minimum? (Many a reviewer has also felt that readers attend only to the flashy adjectives--the "four star ratings"--and ignore the carefully constructed description of a work or art.)

Will the presence of more information stimulate higher interest in attending a film after reading a positive appraisal, or will positive valuation alone prove sufficient to stimulate high interest as neutral information is stripped away? Will the presence of extensive neutral information raise the effect of a mixed review to the level of a positive review? Will the reduction in such information tilt the effects of a mixed review toward the negative end of the interest spectrum? And will information alone mitigate the effects of negative reviews in suppressing interest?

How will the presence of different levels of neutral information affect subjects' perceptions of review type or direction? Are subjects more likely to classify reviews containing a greater amount of neutral information as more positive? Or will they classify a review solely on its evaluative dimension?

To answer these questions, a pre-test, post-test controlled laboratory experiment was conducted on 226 students enrolled in large introductory mass media courses for majors and for non-

majors at a state university. Subjects were randomly assigned to one of seven film-review treatments of different evaluative directions and information levels: negative, mixed and positive reviews with a low level of information; negative, mixed and positive reviews with a high level of information; and a "non-review" which contained a high level of information but no evaluative adjectives or phrases.

The following hypotheses were adopted:

1) Reviews containing higher levels of neutral information will produce significantly higher film-attendance interest than those containing lower levels.

2) Reviews containing more positive evaluations will produce significantly higher film-attendance interest than those containing more negative evaluations, regardless of interest level.

3) Within the same review type (negative, mixed, positive), reviews containing higher levels of information will increase film-attendance interest significantly more than reviews containing lower levels of information.

4) Within the same review type (negative, mixed, positive), reviews containing higher levels of information will be classified as significantly more positive than reviews containing lower levels of information.

Method

As a pre-test, subjects were provided brief descriptions--including titles, names of stars and plot summaries--of 12 films,

including the treatment film to be reviewed later. Following the procedure employed by Haskins,[15] subjects were asked to rate their interest in attending each film on 0-100 scales.

Subjects were then randomly exposed to one of the seven review treatments, which were constructed systematically following a procedure adopted in previous studies of review effects.[16] The film selected for the experiment was a forthcoming release that had not been publicized or shown in the area where the experiment was conducted.

First the experimenters--both experienced reviewers--constructed a positive review of the selected film, including a normal amount of plot summary and background information. Then, by substituting polar-opposite adjectives in the evaluative phrases while holding background information and plot detail constant, they produced a negative review. A mixed review was then crafted by substituting mixed or neutral adjectives in the evaluative phrases. These three treatments served as the high-information condition.

Next, the "non-review," or neutral-informative treatment, was generated by removing all evaluative adjectives but leaving the remaining syntax intact. In order to assure that the non-review was neutral not only denotatively but connotatively, five professional arts critics at a metropolitan daily newspaper were asked to judge whether the plot summary and background detail were negative, mixed, neutral or positive. Without exception, the five rated the treatment neutral.

Finally, to create the low-information condition, the background information and plot summary were excised from the positive, mixed and negative reviews, but the evaluative phrases were left intact with the small amount of information they contained. Because the treatments followed pre-test exposure to a brief plot summary, the investigators felt that sufficient information about the film would be conveyed to allow subjects in the low-information condition to assess their interest in attending.

After exposure to the reviews, subjects were again asked to rate their interest in attending the treatment film on 0-100 scales, then were directed to categorize the "article" they had read as negative, mixed, neutral or positive.

The high-information review treatments and the non-review, for example, advised subjects that the film was the story of "two complete strangers who independently conceive the notion of liberating" giant turtles from a well-known zoo. The male lead was described as "a bookstore clerk" who "now lives in a rooming house populated with eccentric boarders." The female lead, subjects learned, is "a well-known writer of children's animal stories who is seeking inspiration for her next book." These and other narrative details were stripped from the low-information treatments.

The evaluative phrases, among other judgments, styled the treatment film a "beautiful/uneven/poor" adaptation of the novel upon which it was based. The director was said to handle the

script with "great/some/little" skill, and the lead actor's performance was judged as "excellent/satisfactory/awful."[17]

Results

The treatment film received a mean pre-test rating of 26.72, placing it last among the 12 films rated before the presentation of the experimental reviews. A two-way analysis of variance testing the effects of review direction (negative, mixed, positive) and information level (low, high) on the post-treatment gain in film-attendance interest indicated that both main effects were significant ($F = 10.73$, $df = 3/183$, $p < .001$) but that the interaction effect was not.

The first hypothesis--that reviews containing higher levels of neutral information will produce significantly higher film-attendance interest than those containing lower levels--was thus accepted ($F = 5.46$, $df = 1/183$, $p < .05$). The low-information condition caused a drop in mean interest (-1.03), and the high-information condition caused a significant increase (6.24). Information level alone accounted for 3 percent of the variance in interest gain (eta = .16). Mean pre- and post-treatment scores and gain scores for the effects of information level are reported in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 about here

The second hypothesis--that reviews containing more positive evaluations will produce significantly higher film-attendance interest than those containing more negative evaluations regardless of information level--was also accepted (F = 13.27, df = 2/183, $p < .001$). The Tukey-HSD multiple-comparison procedure found that the mixed-review condition increased interest significantly compared with the negative-review condition and that the positive-review condition significantly increased interest compared with both the mixed- and negative-review conditions at the established .05 significance level.

The negative-review condition produced a decrease in mean interest (-7.32), the mixed-review condition produced a modest increase (2.29), and the positive-review condition produced a greater increase (11.98). Review direction alone accounted for 12 percent of the variance in interest gain (eta = .35). Mean pre-test, post-test and gain scores for the effects of review direction and details of significance tests are reported in Table 2.

Insert Table 2 about here

The third hypothesis--that within the same review type (negative, mixed, positive), reviews containing higher levels of information will increase film-attendance interest significantly more than reviews with lower levels of information--was however, rejected. A one-way ANOVA comparing the non-review and all six discrete review types found significant differences among

treatments (F = 7.35, df = 6/215, p < .001), but the Tukey-HSD followup procedure found no significant differences in reviews sharing the same evaluative direction but different information levels. Mean pre-test, post-test and gain scores for the effect of the seven review treatments and details of significance tests are reported in Table 3.

Insert Table 3 about here

As the graph in Figure 1 illustrates, all effects were in the predicted direction from negative to positive. No low-information condition outranked its high-information counterpart, suggesting that the presence of a higher level of neutral information produces a positive impetus within each review direction. But this impetus is not sufficient to move the high-information condition of a negative review ahead of the low-information condition of a mixed review, nor the high-information condition of the mixed review ahead of the low-information condition of the positive review. Further, the non-review--or neutral, information-only condition--produced a higher level of interest that than any review type except the positive high-information treatments. That is, information alone had a decidedly positive effect until combined with evaluation, which considerably diminished its impact. Only the two negative treatments, however, actually lowered film-attendance interest.

Insert Figure 1 about here

According to the Tukey procedure, the neutral non-review increased interest significantly compared with both negative treatments. And the positive high-interest treatment increased interest significantly compared with both negative and mixed conditions. The positive low-information review, however, did not differ significantly from any condition. Review direction in this analysis accounted for 17 percent of the variance in interest gain (*eta* = .41).

Hypothesis 4--that within the same review type (negative, mixed, positive) reviews containing higher levels of information will be classified as significantly more positive than reviews containing lower levels of information--was accepted. Contingency-table analysis found the distribution of subjects' classification to be highly significant (*chi-square* = 151.74, *df* = 18, $p < .001$).

Examination of the distribution in Table 4 indicates that, in every case, a greater number of subjects classified the low-information review condition as more negative than its high-information counterpart. Further, a plurality of subjects perceived the mixed low-information review as negative, while a majority perceived the mixed high-information review as mixed. Interestingly, a slight majority perceived the non-review as mixed, followed by more than one-fourth who perceived it as

positive--despite the fact that that treatment produced an overwhelmingly positive effect on film interest.

Insert Table 4 about here

When review treatments are arranged ordinally according to their effect in increasing film-attendance interest and correlated with classifications arranged compatibly (see Table 4), the result is a significant but moderate correlation (Kendall's $\underline{tau}_c$ = .55), suggesting that subjects had more difficulty classifying review treatments than in Wyatt and Badger's previous experiment, where correlation was high (Kendall's $\underline{tau}_b$ = .72).[18] That experiment, however, included only three review directions and three classification choices (negative, mixed positive).

Summary and Discussion

The major findings of this study are:

1) A higher level of non-evaluative, neutral information exerts a significant positive effect on interest in attending a film independent of review direction.

2) Reviews with more positive evaluations significantly increase film-attendance interest regardless of information level. Evaluation direction, further, accounts for a greater amount of the variance in interest gain (12 percent) than information level (3 percent).

3) Information level is not sufficient to increase film-attendance interest significantly within review types (negative, mixed, positive) nor to cause one review type to take on the interest-increasing characteristics of a more positive review type.

4) A neutral non-review increases film-attendance interest almost as much as a positive, high-information review and more than a positive, low-information review--results consistent with a previous study.[19] Thus, information alone, undiluted by evaluative adjectives, remains relatively powerful in increasing interest.

5) Subjects perceive review types with higher levels of information as significantly more positive than those with lower levels within the same review type.

These results indicate that, in processing reviews, a greater amount of neutral information increases film-attendance interest significantly. That is, when holding evaluation constant regardless of its direction, a higher level of neutral information exerts a positive, though not always significant, effect. That effect is not, however, sufficiently strong to overcome by itself the effect of negative, mixed or positive appraisals contained in evaluative adjectives and phrases.

With regard to entertainment and arts criticism, the results suggest that higher amounts of neutral information alone may produce positive effects without resorting to the superlatives commonly associated with press-release puffery or reviewer hype. The neutral non-review did not different significantly in its

effect on interest from the positive reviews, and it actually raised interest more than the positive, low-information condition. But the results also indicate that evaluation is still a stronger factor than information unless that information is isolated from mixed or negative evaluations.

The fact that subjects identified reviews containing a higher level of neutral information as significantly more positive may help account for the difference between reviewers' and readers' perceptions of the valence of reviews, particularly when readers perceive reviews as more positive than reviewers might have intended.

Distinguishing between the mixed and neutral treatments caused subjects some difficulty (see Table 4). It is interesting to note that a higher percentage classified the mixed low-information condition as negative than as mixed or neutral, while the mixed high-information condition was perceived by a majority to be mixed. It is also interesting to note that, although a majority identified the non-review as mixed (despite its decidedly positive effect), more than one-fourth classified it as positive. And the low-information condition in the positive review resulted in one-fourth each categorizing the review as mixed or neutral.

The understanding that information and evaluation are the two major components of mass media reviews leads to a recognition that conventional theories of persuasion--those which analyze the effects of argumentation, dissonance, social judgment and the like--are not particularly relevant to examining the effects of

reviews. Further, similarities between reviewing and other forms of "evaluative journalism," including sports, consumer and political writing, suggest that a new and more comprehensive taxonomy of the forms of journalism is in order and that the study of similar elements and effects among these forms of writing might be warranted.

The experimental film in this study received the lowest interest score among the 12 films rated in the pretest, a fact that might challenge the generalizability of these findings to films of moderate or high initial interest levels. However, results from two other recent, as yet unpublished experiments by the authors indicate that the overall effects of review direction are fairly uniform, regardless of whether initial interest is high, moderate or low.

Although the present study increases our knowledge of the relative effects of information and evaluation in evaluative journalism, it does little to open the cognitive "black box" of the reader's mind and explain how these review elements affect the various components which together produce the composite variable termed "interest." In the future, research might isolate the various components of interest and ascertain how different kinds of reviews manipulate different elements of interest.

However, from the evidence developed in the present study, at least two postulates about general communication behavior may be advanced and subjected to further testing:

1) Inherently neutral prior information about artistic events and other public occasions exerts a generally positive

influence on interest when that information is not accompanied by evaluation. This effect appears to hold when initial interest in the occasion is low, as in the current experiment, or when it is moderate or high, as Wyatt and Badger have demonstrate in previous published and unpublished experiments. Whether the effect will hold for prior information about occasions expected to be highly unpleasant (an upcoming execution, for example) is unknown.

2) When neutral prior information is accompanied by evaluation, the evaluation is sufficient to diminish or override the effect of information alone. Thus, in the present experiment, negative adjectives significantly diminished interest in the experimental film compared with the neutral non-review, regardless of whether the negative review possessed a high or low information level.

The present study is, of course, vulnerable to the imperfections to which experimental research is heir, although the use of student subjects is not necessarily a disadvantage in film research. The experiment does, however, suggest that, although there may be no arguing with taste, its presence exerts a significant effect.

NOTES

[1]Gerald R. Miller, "Persuasion," in Charles R. Berger and Steven H. Chaffee, eds., Handbook of Communication Science (Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage, 1987), pp. 446-483.

[2]William J. McGuire, "Persuasion, Resistance, and Attitude Change," in Ithiel de Sola Pool, Frederick W. Frey, Wilbur Schramm, Nathan Maccoby and Edwin B. Parker, eds., Handbook of Communication (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1973), p. 219.

[3]Richard E. Petty and John T. Cacioppo, Attitudes and Persuasion: Classic and Contemporary Approaches (Dubuque, Iowa.,: Wm. C. Brown Co., 1981), p. 7.

[4]Martin Fishbein and Icek Ajzen, Belief, Attitude, Intention, and Behavior: An Introduction to Theory and Research (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1975), p. 6.

[5]John Hohenberg, Concise Newswriting (New York: Hastings House, 1987), p. 266. See, also, Jack L. Hillwig, Film Criticism: Its Relationship to Economically Successful Films and an Application of Rhetoric to Improving the Critic's Method (Doctoral Dissertation, Ohio State University, 1980); Dwight Macdonald, On Movies (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1969); Susan Miles, "The Function of the Critic," The British Journal of Psychology, 20:372-385 (1930).

[6]Robert O. Wyatt and David P. Badger, "What Newspaper Film Critics Value in Film and Film Criticism: A National Survey," in Current Research in Film, vol. 4, ed. by Bruce A. Austin (New York: Ablex, 1988), pp. 54-71. A third factor, "Audience Reaction," was extremely weak.

[7]Quoted in David Sylvester, "Theater Critics and Criticism," Nieman Reports, (Summer 1986), p. 45.

[8]William L. Rivers, Bryce McIntyre and Alison Work, Writing Opinion: Editorials, (Ames, Iowa.: Iowa State University Press, 1988); William L. Rivers, Writing Opinion: Reviews. (Ames, Iowa.: Iowa State University Press, 1988); Harold F. Graves and Bernard S. Oldsey, From Fact to Judgment, 2nd ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1963).

[9]See, for example, Harry W. Stonecipher, Editorial and Persuasive Writing: Opinion Functions of the News Media (New York: Hastings House, 1979); Chilton R. Bush, Editorial Thinking and Writing (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1970); Harold F. Graves and Bernard S. Oldsey, From Fact to Judgment, 2nd ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1963).

[10]Robert O. Wyatt and David P. Badger, "How Reviews Affect Interest in and Evaluation of Films," Journalism Quarterly, 61:874-878 (1984); Robert O. Wyatt and David P. Badger, "To Toast, Pan or Waffle: How Film Reviews Affect Reader Interest and Credibility Perception," Newspaper Research Journal, 8:19-30 (1987).

[11]Jack B. Haskins, "Pretesting Editorial Items and Ideas for Reader Interest," Journalism Quarterly, 37:224-230 (1960); Jack B. Haskins, "Pretesting Interest in Messages," Journal of Advertising Research, 15:31-35 (1975); Jack B. Haskins and Leonard Kubas, "Validation of a Method for Pre-testing Reader Interest in Newspaper Content," Journalism Quarterly, 56:269-276, 310 (1979).

[12]Robert B. Zajonc, "Attitudinal Effects of Mere Exposure," Journal of Personality and Social Psychology Monograph Supplement, 9:1-27 (1968).

[13]Abraham Moles, Information Theory and Aesthetic Perception (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1968).

[14]Karl Halvor Teigen, "The Novel and the Familiar: Sources of Interest in Verbal Information," Current Psychological Research Reviews," 4:225-238 (1985).

[15]Haskins, op. cit.

[16]Wyatt and Badger, op. cit., "How Reviews Affect" and "To Toast, Pan or Waffle."

[17]Copies of full review treatments are available from the authors.

[18]Op. cit., "How Reviews Affect," p. 877.

[19]Wyatt and Badger, op. cit., "How Reviews Affect" and "To Toast, Pan or Waffle."

Table 1

Mean Pre-test, Post-test and Gain Scores for the Effect of Review Information Level on Interest in Attending a Film

	Pre-test	Post-test	Gain
Low Information	26.29	25.00	-1.03
High Information	28.83	34.59	6.24

Table 2

Mean Pre-test, Post-test and Gain Scores for the Effect of Review Evaluative Condition on Interest in Attending a Film*

	Pre-test	Post-test	Gain
Negative	29.86	21.06	-7.32^{ab}
Mixed	25.19	27.89	2.29^{ac}
Positive	27.51	39.49	11.98^{bc}

*Means with the same superscript are significantly different at the .05 level according to the Tukey-HSD multiple-range procedure.

Table 3

Mean Pre-test, Post-test and Gain Scores for the Effect of Seven Discrete Review Review Treatments on Interest in Attending a Film*

	Pre-test	Post-test	Gain
Negative Low Information	29.03	18.97	-10.06[ac]
Negative High Information	30.69	24.00	-4.40[bd]
Mixed Low Information	25.00	26.64	1.64[e]
Mixed High Information	25.40	29.31	3.03[f]
Positive Low Information	24.91	29.97	5.06
Neutral "Non-review"	22.03	34.76	12.73[ab]
Positive High Information	30.19	49.31	19.13[cdef]

*Means with the same superscript are significantly different at the .05 level according to the Tukey-HSD multiple-range procedure.

Table 4

Distribution of Subject Identification of Seven Discrete Review Treatments

	Negative	Mixed	Neutral	Positive
Negative Low Information	27 (82%)	4 (12%)	2 (6%)	
Negative High Information	24 (77%)	3 (10%)	3 (10%)	1 (3%)
Mixed Low Information	13 (39%)	6 (18%)	12 (36%)	2 (6%)
Mixed High Information	6 (21%)	15 (52%)	6 (21%)	2 (7%)
Positive Low Information	2 (6%)	8 (25%)	8 (25%)	14 (44%)
Neutral "Non-review"	2 (7%)	17 (57%)	3 (10%)	8 (27%)
Positive High Information		8 (26%)	4 (13%)	19 (61%)

Figure 1: Effect of Seven Review Conditions
on Film-Attendance Interest Gain